Untold Stories: The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century

Mark S. Smith.

Peabody/MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 2001, 252 + xix p.

The author, Skirball Professor for Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at New York University, has recently "unleashed" onto the public a series of publications[1], of which this one is likely to be the most entertaining to read. S. presents a comprehensive *Forschungsgeschichte* of the discoveries at Ugarit and their impact on biblical studies from its origins in 1928 up to 1999, some events even reaching into 2000. The book is divided into four parts: The beginnings 1928-1945 (p. 13-49), the postwar period 1945-1970 (p. 51-128), a transitional period 1970-1985 (p. 129-187) and recent developments 1985-1999 (p. 189-238). Each of the periods is itself divided in an archaeological, a linguistic and a larger historical section where the major academic developments of that time are recounted. These are divided geographically and according to the main topics and discussions of that era. Each period is furthermore followed by an extensive annotation, making up about one third of the entire book. On some occasions, S. presents his own opinion on a disputed topic, e. g. the New Year's Enthronement Festival (p. 85-87).

What distinguishes this volume from similar endeavors is that S. spices up a large part of the historical account with personal stories about the main figures and their

[1] Aside from the book under review also *The origins of biblical monotheism: Israel's polytheistic background and the Ugaritic texts,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), as well as the 2nd edition of his 1990 book *The Early History of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

accomplishments, largely obtained through personal contacts and archive researches. Not surprisingly and readily admitted by S. (p. 8), American scholars take up the larger part of this study, but at the same time giving due importance to the major European scholars.[2] Canadian research on Ugarit found entry into the book as well: A paragraph is dedicated to P. C. Craigie (McMaster/Calgary; p. 152) and Université de Montréal's own Lourik Karkajian (now Toronto) along with her thesis director Robert David are briefly mentioned (p. 209).

While the argument could be raised that not all the information given is necessarily relevant to Ugaritic Studies[3], it does give the reader a good insight in the interpersonal relationships among most North American scholars involved in Ugaritic research. Especially, the towering figure of W. F. Albright emerges as one of the main players on the scene in the postwar period and beyond. Without his blessing, it seems, no major appointment at an American university was possible. Despite some animosities (E. Speiser/C. H. Gordon) and rivalries, the book reveals a well-knit network of *Seilschaften*, which might explain Gordon's appointment to an Egyptology chair without knowing Egyptian (p. 74), making his achievements the more remarkable.

Overall, S. presents an interesting and fairly complete account of the history of Ugaritic research with special attention to the growing and waning importance for Biblical Studies. Some minor errors (e.g. according to p. 33, World War II begins on

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[2] For an overview of the growing Japanese research on the Ancient Near East, some of whose scholars are also mentioned by S. as part of their respective institution see the recent issue of *Orient* 36, 2001.

[3] See N. Wyatt in his review (*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 4, 2002-2003, www.arts.ualberta.ca/jhs/reviews/review061.htm).

September 3, 1939, two days after the actual invasion of Poland by Nazi-Germany) should not deter the potential reader from an entertaining and informative book.

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